

## **A note on key Concepts for Social Impact of Research Assessment**

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The generalisation of social and policy impact evaluation of research is a much newer reality than scientific impact evaluation for most researchers and funding agencies. There is certain disorientation about how to proceed to successfully address this endeavour. Although this is a highly complex task, it should be solved as soon as possible -certainly- without devoting decades of work as it has been the case of scientific impact. An increasing number of funding international and national agencies are preparing their social and policy impact evaluations, based on the experience of the researchers who were already obtaining social impact and who were also evaluating it for years.

While scientific impact evaluation is more recently conducted by the research community, the evaluation of social and policy impact should count with active citizenship participation. It will be possible to know more precisely whether the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine or an annual gynaecologist exam have more social impact if the voices of citizens, their experiences and narratives are considered. Even better, the knowledge will increase if we also consider data gathered by European, state or regional health departments; scientific publications - which have already evaluated the consequences of vaccination or annual exams-; and/or social impact repositories -which at medium and long-term basis will take a key role in advancing social and policy impact measurement.

Thus, social and policy impact repositories are likely to become fundamental tools for the evaluation of social and policy impact, like journal rankings such as Scopus or Web of Science currently are for the evaluation of scientific impact. In the same way that researcher -as part of our work- we have now the obligation to gather evidence of our scientific impact contributions and even send it to scientific journals to be evaluated, we should define systems able to also gather the evidence of social and policy impact of our work and evaluate it both during and after the research.

Research should contribute to the objectives that have been democratically defined by society (e.g. missions, SDG) and not by researchers. This approach implies a major advance for science and for society: putting scientific knowledge at the very service of society. For example, United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5), aiming at "Gender equality" defines what targets/indicators are needed to reach Social Impact (SI) to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Thus, Social Impact Indicator (SII) refers to the indicators aiming at achieving this objective, being SI resulting or not from scientific research. If SI is research-based, and it has been demonstrated, there is Social Impact of Research (SIR).

Thus, Social Impact of Research (SIR) is the contribution of research to SI, showing the ways in which and the extent to what European research programmes, following the previous example about SDG 5, have contributed to the mentioned increase of women in power positions. If SI is not research-based, then it includes all actions, programs and so on that have had positive effects on those SDG they respond to (e.g. Ministry grants for including women in managing boards). Given that SIR must be demonstrated, researchers gather evidence of their social impact with the Evidence of Social Impact of Research (ESIR), which consists of qualitative and/or quantitative evidence of the SIR.

An important distinction to be made is between Indicators of Progress on Social Impact of Research (IPSIR) and Indicators of Social Impact of Research (ISIR). At the end, clear evidence is needed of the social impact that research has obtained and with ISIR we have the indicators to guide the evaluation of this evidence. However, to achieve the ultimate social impact, we need to monitor and evaluate the progress of the research towards this objective, and therefore, we have in IPSIR the indicators to evaluate different stages of this progress.

It is important to consider that the contribution of research to social impact does not only refer to those studies that indicate the solution to a given problem. It also refers to those studies that did not find any solution, but that still were necessary for those researches which later found it. For instance, the 2008 Medicine Nobel laureate Harold zur Hausen initiated in 1960 his research on human papillomavirus causing cervical cancer. Most of his early attempts to discover the processes that affected cells to degenerate in cervical cancer failed to demonstrate how the virus was causing this type of cancer. The social impact achieved by this Nobel laureate is not only consequence of the last discoveries of his research, but also all the previous ones. Zur Hausen would have not discovered without his previous research. This is what Research Enabling Social Impact (RESI) refers to. RESI consists of the different studies, from different researchers and topics, that have been essential to finally conduct a concrete research that has specifically achieved social impact (Soler-Gallart, 2017).

The concept of RESI is a point of no-return for all researchers and university professors (Flecha, Soler & Sordé, 2015). Universities are also being demanded by citizens to present evidence of their social impact, in research, teaching and other activities. Instead of resisting this revolution, the scientific community should support researchers with the adequate tools that would facilitate them the task of providing evidence to the citizenry. For instance, social impact repositories, which are being created providing open access to all data, facilitate this task to researchers and guide them. Another tool is the social networks' analytics, which provide researchers with easy, quick and free data from those citizens who are participating in social networks. On the other hand, researchers obtain much more benefits (e.g. attracting more resources, recognition) for using the above-mentioned tools than the cost of the time invested to gather and evaluate their social impact. Indeed, clarifying and making the social impact of research transparent, generates new demands and more support for their work. In the specific area of Science, an increasing number of scholarly journals wish to publish research that includes evidence of their social impact (ESIR) which is associated with the two types of indicators above-mentioned: the Indicators of Social Impact of research ISIR and the Indicators of Progress on Social Impact of Research.

Impact is one of the three selection criteria (five out of fifteen points) in the Horizon 2020, Societal Challenges Programme. In the same way it is possible to evaluate the expected scientific impact of a proposal through previous publications of the members of the consortium, similar procedure is increasingly used to foresee the expected social impact. Efforts for tracing back the social impact of someone's current research represent an investment for being successful in future proposals, as he or she can include this information in their expected impact sections. European and non-European Member States are also including social impact -which becomes progressively important- as one of the criteria when selecting a proposal for funding. An example of this reality is the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the system for assessing research quality in the United Kingdom.

- SI Social Impact is the improvement of society and citizens in relation to their own goals (like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals).
- SII Social Impact Indicator refers to the set of indicators enabling the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the SI achieved (the set of Social Impact Indicators includes subsets like the ones on economic impact, societal impact and others).
- SIR Social Impact of Research is the SI achieved by the research.
- ESIR Evidence of Social Impact of Research is the set of quantitative and qualitative evidence which proves the evaluation of the social impact of the research.
- ISIR Indicators of Social Impact of Research refers to the set of indicators enabling the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the SI achieved due to the use of the research results.
- IPSIR Indicators of Progress on Social Impact of Research is the set of indicators enabling the progress made at different stages of an in-process research oriented to finally achieve SI.
- RESI Research Enabling Social Impact is the set of researches that have been necessary to finally obtain a concrete research that has specifically achieved social impact (although some of this research has not obtained SI individually, they have been essential to enable other research that has specifically achieved SI).
- PIE Policy impact evidence is the computation of the diverse evidence of policy impact.

## References

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